

1913
22A15

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
EXTENSION SERVICE
Washington 25, D. C.

Reserve

THE AIMS AND PURPOSES OF SUPERVISION OF COUNTY EXTENSION AGENTS*

Chas. E. Potter

Field Agent, Extension Service

U. S. Department of Agriculture

Supervision may be discussed in terms of its functions, in terms of its activities, or in terms of its purposes. In this presentation the attention is to be focused upon "Aims and Purposes of Supervision of County Extension Agents."

The words "aims" and "purposes" as used in this discussion are "synonymous." They mean direction; the intent of; the point to which one wishes to get to; the thing to which we aspire and for which we labor. I like the definition of an aim which Mr. H. W. Hochbaum used in his circular entitled, "What Are the Aims in Rural Life?" He said that "an aim is a generalized statement indicating the direction which an activity should be taking." (He also said that an aim may include any number of objectives.)

Let us for a moment try developing a concept of supervision. From my dictionary, I learned that the word "supervise" comes from two Latin words— "super" meaning over, and "videre" meaning to see. Literally, supervision is to oversee. Supervision is also synonymous to direction, guidance, management, oversight, and command. Supervision is not concerned with the direction of things but deals with human beings. It would seem, then, that a supervisor has something to do with the direction, the management, the guidance, and the leadership of a group of people who are responsible for attainment of certain objectives.

One can find many definitions of supervision as we understand it in extension work. There is one, in the circular "Extension Supervisors—What They Do and How They Do It" by Karl Knaus and Cannon Hearne, that defines supervision as "the management of personnel to carry out the purposes of administration." A definition rating high in personnel and management circles is "Supervision is the art of selecting, developing, coöordinating, and directing assistants to secure desired results."

A group of extension administrators and supervisors in the Southern States defined supervision in extension work as "that function of the organization which helps to determine the plan and the program, maintains and improves the personnel, measures results, maintains proper working relationships with cooperating agencies and the general public." Other definitions of supervision are: "Getting others to do work along lines of a prearranged plan" or "Getting work done through the efforts of other people." Another

*Presented at Regional Conference of Extension Supervision, La Fayette, Ind., March 7, 1946.

definition states that "Supervision is the development of people." Recently, a county agent leader told me that "Extension supervision deals with the continuous growth and development of each individual county extension agent so that the agent can do a better job in helping rural people to have a better living and a better rural life." "Supervision is not just the skill of keeping employees working effectively on the job," says a Department of Agriculture Graduate School circular on supervision, "It is also the art of getting things done and helping others understand and plan it."

A committee on extension supervision at the Institute of Administrative Management, held in 1942 at the University of Minnesota, stated that "Supervision is the continuous improvement in the quality of work done by the county extension workers."

The word "supervisor" is relatively new in extension language. It has been in common use in industrial and school circles for many years. Cooper defines a supervisor as any individual who has subordinates reporting to him. It has come into general use in Extension during the last 10 years. Its use seems to have come about because of a need of finding an over-all term to designate the various kinds of State leaders, State agents, and district agents who are in immediate charge of county extension agents.

An extension supervisor holds a position of great responsibility. Perhaps the most important single influence upon a county extension agent is his or her supervisor. The worth of an extension supervisor is measured by (1) the amount of influence he exercises upon the activities of the agents he supervises and (2) by the ability he has to reflect the field situation to the extension administrator.

Supervision is a part of a general administrative program. It is often difficult to draw a sharp official line between administrative duties and supervisory duties. Administration, management, and supervision have much in common. All have aspects involving getting things done through the efforts of other people. Often the only difference between administration and supervision is a matter of degree of responsibility. It is the responsibility of the extension director to clarify the status and responsibility of his supervisors. It is the director who develops policies, lays out functions, assigns responsibilities, delegates authorities, appraises results, and determines relationships with other people. The clarity with which these jobs are done determines in a large measure the morale and effectiveness of the extension staff. The extension supervisor sees to it that all agents under him are thoroughly informed on policy, functions, responsibilities, and relationships. He is the person largely responsible for the operation of the organization. It is he who sees that the agents work according to the plan and objectives of the administration. An extension supervisor, then, is a person who handles the technical and human-relations aspects of a job concerned with the direction, coordination, development, and leadership of county extension agents. Over the years the functions and responsibilities of the State leaders of extension agents have grown to be a mixture of administrative and supervisory jobs.

Director Paul E. Miller, of Minnesota, in speaking at the Eastern States Conference on Extension Supervision in 1944, said:

"To the supervisor are delegated certain specific tasks.

"He is held responsible for county finances and budgets.

"He is held responsible for recommending personnel for county positions.

"He is held responsible for relationships within the county office and for relationships between the county staff and the people of the county.

"And, finally, he is responsible for the guidance of the county programs and the work plans."

The first of these three, said Director Miller, may be classified as administrative; the last is supervision as we use the term in expressing the primary and all-important job of the supervisor.

An analysis of the objectives stated in the 1943 plans of work of county agent leaders in the Eastern region showed that more leaders listed objectives in the administrative field than in the supervisory phase of extension work.

Objectives pertaining to extension administration	Percentage of State leaders who listed objectives in this field
Public relations	66
Staff maintenance.	55
Extension finance.	44
Organization for carrying on extension work.	33

Objectives pertaining to extension supervision	Percentage of State leaders who listed objectives in this field
Program development.	55
Volunteer leader use	44
Extension method	33
Training extension agents.	22
Working condition of extension agents.	22
Evaluating work of extension agents.	22

We do not want to minimize any administrative function performed by the extension supervisor, but we do wish in this talk to stress those phases of the supervisory job which are of great importance and fundamental to developing maximum service among extension workers. If, then, the job of an

APR 26 1946

extension supervisor is the continued improvement in the efficiency of the county extension staff, toward what end shall this efficiency be pointed. If extension supervisors are responsible for the management of county extension agents to carry out the purposes of extension administration, what is the purpose of extension administration?

The Smith-Lever Act says that agricultural extension work may be inaugurated "in order to aid in diffusing among the people of the United States useful and practical information on subjects relating to agriculture and home economics and to encourage the application of the same." I wish to call attention to the breadth of the language in the Smith-Lever Act. The words "relating to agriculture and home economics" give broad coverage in the field and provide for action, through the encouragement of the recipients of such instruction, to apply it. This, to me, means that Extension helps plan for such action as will make it as easy as possible for farm people to accomplish the desired results. There is more involved than just the passing out of scientific information. There is more involved than a technical advisory service for farm people. Included in this concept of subjects relating to agriculture and home economics is the educational responsibility leading to an increased understanding of contemporary economic and social problems which affect farm people.

In the report of the survey of the land-grant colleges and universities made by the Office of Education in 1930, it was stated: "The fundamental function of the Smith-Lever Extension education is the development of rural people themselves. This is accomplished by fostering attitudes of mind and capacities which will enable them better to meet those individual and civic problems with which they are confronted."

In the report of the Workshop on Integration and Coordination at the Institute of Administrative Management at the University of Minnesota, in August 1942, the committee said that the purpose of the Extension Service "is to improve conditions that affect the lives of rural people through the positive action of these people themselves in a way that will result in better citizenship. Its purpose is to stimulate and inspire people to do things for themselves voluntarily and through understanding."

It is, therefore, very clear that the primary functions of the Extension Service is education. Dr. Paul Kruse, of Cornell University, defines education as the "production of changes in human behavior."

The aim of extension supervisors is to develop a staff of county extension agents who will help rural people solve their own problems. Extension education is responsible for bringing about changes in people's ways of doing and acting. Changes in behavior are usually classified as follows:

Changes in things known -- knowledge

Changes in things done -- skills

Changes in things felt -- attitudes

While it may be included in the above classification, I want to mention another change—the ability of people to solve problems. We are constantly impressed with the growth of our rural people in this respect. This should be definitely a part of our concept of education.

County extension agents are continually setting the situation so as to get people to react in the direction of the changes desired. The extension agent is a teacher, an expeditor, a catalytic agent. His aim is to help people achieve the goals which they have determined as desirable. He must understand human behavior. He must be skilled in the use and appropriateness of the various teaching tools used in extension work. Above all, he must be clear as to the objective of farm people and the part he is to play in helping them to achieve their objectives. Knowing and being able to identify the desired behavior changes is probably the most difficult task of the agent.

The job of the county extension agent is to help human beings change their habits of thought and action with respect to—

- (a) Improved ways of making a living.
- (b) Raising the quality and satisfactions of living.
- (c) Developing ability to solve more and more of their own problems.

The aim, then, of extension supervision is to help the county extension agent be more efficient in doing his or her job. Extension supervision is the art of improving, developing, coordinating, and directing the county extension agents toward extension goals. The supervisor must know the job he supervises. He must know the people whom he supervises. He must know how to inspire them. He must know how to analyze the needs of his staff.

In order to carry out the aim of extension supervision, what kind of help should a supervisor give his agents? The following questions may serve as a guide:

1. Do the agents understand the purposes and policies of the Extension Service in my State and what they should do? Do the agents have a clear picture of what their job is? Do I help the agents to know what knowledge, skills, attitudes, and personal qualifications are needed to get the job done?
2. Do I help the agents assemble the facts that are needed to plan and organize an extension program? Do I help the agents in analyzing problems and in program determination?
3. Do I assist the agents in the making of plans? Do I help them to look ahead as well as prepare for the short-time course of action? Do I help the agents in developing working plans and procedures?
4. Do I help the agents to develop in the needed organization and coordination necessary to carry out the plans?

5. Do I stimulate the agents to get things done? Do I show them how to use local leaders and committees? Do I help them to develop directing abilities? Do I aid the agents in making contact with the sources of specialized assistance needed?
6. Do I provide for the agents the training which will have as its end the improvement of extension work as well as of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of the agent? Do I lead in developing methods by which the work of the agent can be done better? Do I give confidence to the agents by keeping them qualified to cope with changes in the job, new skills, new information, economic and social changes, and new objectives?
7. Have I given the agents some idea of the standards toward which they should work, and have I helped them measure their actual performance against these standards? Do I provide the answer to the agents' question, "How am I doing?" Do I provide opportunities for the agents to contribute to the improvement of the extension program, working conditions, and policies?
8. Are my relations with the agents such as will develop morale, enthusiasm, and satisfaction? Do I make it easy for the agents to "unload their troubles" to me? Do I work with and think with them? Do I inspire? Do I recognize ability and potential leadership? Do I give credit where credit is due?
9. Do I cooperate with my fellow supervisors in furthering the general objectives of the extension program and for building a unity of purpose throughout the entire organization?

The aim of extension supervision, then, is:

To develop county extension agents and coordinate their activities and those that assist them so as to do an effective job in aiding rural people to make the changes in their ways of doing and acting which the people feel are desirable.